



## **STATEMENT BY ABKHAZ PRESIDENT SERGEI BAGAPSH ON GEORGIA'S ATTEMPTS TO THWART NGO WORK IN THE REPUBLIC OF ABKHAZIA**

The Georgia State Ministry for Reintegration is currently pressuring NGOs working in Abkhazia not to sign documents with the Republic's Government that would establish a legal framework for them to operate in this country. This untoward and unauthorized political maneuvering – a clear interference in our internal affairs – could unnecessarily disrupt NGO humanitarian services from 12 international organizations to thousands of innocent civilians.

The Republic of Abkhazia has been negotiating in good faith with NGOs operating in our country for a year and a half to establish a legal framework that would enable them to continue their much-needed work here. Since the dissolution of the Moscow Agreement of 1994, in the wake of Abkhazia's 2008 declaration of independence from Georgia and subsequent recognition by the Russian Federation and three other United Nations Member Countries, there has been no legal authority to govern NGOs serving Abkhazia. Every country in the world has formal legal agreements with NGOs operating within its borders. Those agreements are traditionally co-signed by NGO executives and appropriate officials of the host government. The 12 NGOs working in Abkhazia acknowledge that there needs to be similar legal framework governing their presence here. Each has been cooperating with us to establish appropriate language and a legal spirit to establish that capacity.

Now President Mikheil Saakashvili's State Ministry of Reintegration is proposing that NGOs working in Abkhazia simply agree to a code of conduct that has no legal governing authority. No government would stand for that, and no NGO would want its people working under such ill-defined conditions. To make matters worse, Georgia's State Ministry of Reintegration is a farcical ministry, with no legal standing in my country. As we have said many times, The Republic of Abkhazia is not part of Georgia, and it never will be. The Republic of Abkhazia is an independent country with its own laws. It is only reasonable that we and the leaders of the NGOs working in Abkhazia would insist on a valid legal instrument to govern how each of the parties conducts themselves. Without rule-of-law principles, neither party would be wise to continue their relationships.

I call on the international NGO community to urge the Government of Georgia to cease immediately its campaign to politicize humanitarian NGO services and to stay out of Abkhazia's sovereign internal affairs. We want the current NGOs that work here to remain and they have assured us that they wish to do so. The work they are doing here is important. The highly respected International Crisis Group has affirmed that NGOs working in Abkhazia make positive contributions to our country. In fact, ICG's most recent report recommends that these NGOs remain in Abkhazia. The Georgian government's interference in this work is shortsighted, untenable, and inhumane. If Georgia's leaders are allowed to succeed in this cynical political maneuver, the ones who will suffer the most are the innocent civilians who will be deprived of the assistance they need to build a better future.

***Sergei Bagapsh***  
***President,***  
***The Republic of Abkhazia***  
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